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ABSTRACT

The systemic reform exemplified by the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA) requires the coupling of top-down state mandates with bottom-up advocacy and leadership. This research on an Eastern Kentucky school district details the dynamics at the district's main high school, as people struggle to build both a community of learners within the school and bridges for meaningful community participation in the school and district. A key focus of the work is the linkages between youth and adult disengagement, which are contextualized within local-local and local-state balances of power. Historically, Appalachia has been viewed as backward and in need of modernization, consequently, curricula are not relevant to Appalachian needs or world view. Alienation and disengagement arise from the resultant pattern of past failure, the expectation of continued failure, and the feeling that schools are no longer a community institution since the demise of local schools. Endemic poverty results in the school system being used as a source of good jobs controlled by the local elite, rather than a source of education for children. Thus, concerns about education are viewed as personal attacks on the power elite which invite retaliation. Pervasive distrust of the State, and "outsiders" in general, reinforces disengagement. Site-based decision making, superintendent screening committees, and state-level legal recourse provided by KERA offer previously disengaged people new opportunities for public leadership, yet change is only acceptable to the extent that it does not define eastern Kentucky cognitive frameworks and social-political relations as "problems" to be solved by "flatlanders." (TD)

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IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILDREN: Community Engagement with Education in Appalachian Kentucky

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Appalachian Kentucky, under the controversial Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA), is an exceptionally intriguing and consequential site to explore the problematic struggle for community engagement with education. Long a system that has defied attempts at centralized control, Kentucky schools have entered a new era that promises sweeping changes in both practice and ideology. The reform's emphasis on community-based leadership has the potential to transform community hierarchies of power and authority in arenas far past the schoolhouse door.

The systemic reform exemplified by KERA requires the effective coupling of top-down state mandates with bottom-up advocacy and leadership. The best interest of the children is served by effectively engaging diverse members of the host communities with educational policies. However difficult, this process is critical. As the AEL Interim Report (1988) notes, because of Appalachian peoples' emphasis on self-reliance and their concern for autonomy, any externally initiated efforts to improve rural schools and, thereby, communities over the long term must actively cultivate ownership of the effort by rural residents. Only by reclaiming the schools as their own, can schools once again become sites for community exchange and renewal. Only by actively engaging with the process of democratization can previously disenfranchised people make the investments needed to sustain viable and vibrant rural communities.

Exclusion of rural voices from policy-making has been a major factor in the repeated misalignment of school reform with the actual needs and perspectives of people in highly diverse rural settings. To redress this trend, it is imperative to gain a clearer understanding of the local context and citizens' diverse priorities so as to better integrate these with the policies set by state-level professional reformers. Insiders and outsiders both need to see each other as partners, engaged in a common venture. To work toward sustainable development, both need to embrace the cultural resources, symbolic systems, and political and social networks indigenous to a place, as well as critically assess proposed reforms to see how they might be adapted to best serve local needs.

RESEARCH AIMS

This paper is drawn from dissertation research in progress. The larger project is the culmination of a year's full-time ethnographic fieldwork in a mountainous Appalachian district in Kentucky. It details the dynamics at Central, the county's main high school, as people struggle to build both a community of learners within the school and to build bridges for meaningful community participation in the school and district. The significant first steps that emerge as critical to the larger transformation of community engagement are detailed. A key aspect of the work, that is vital to long-term, sustainable community development, is the focus on the linkages between youth and adult disengagement. I contextualize these within local-local and local-state balances of power, parallel dimensions that interact in strategic ways.

THE SITE

The capacity of the Appalachian Kentucky case to highlight contradictions and deficiencies in the larger discourse in American educational policy has yet to be fully brought to light. While several writers (Ikenberry, 1970; Branscome, 1972; Clark, 1974; Miller, 1977; Browning, 1978; Ogletree, 1978) have offered commentaries on the persistence of regional educational inadequacies and incongruities, and offered their prescriptions for remedying the situation, systematic ethnographic studies that focus on schooling in Appalachia are few and far between. Some community studies have included references to educational institutions or to modes of learning (Weller, 1965; Fetterman, 1967; Stephenson, 1968; Beaver, 1976; Hicks, 1976; Foster, 1977), but none of these have focused specifically on the multiple roles that schools and schooling play in Appalachian settings. Furthermore, surveys that have sought to investigate issues of identity have tended to cast "Appalachian" students as a set, thereby failing to integrate issues of class, economic well-being, connection to place, gender, race, generation, etc. into the discussion.

Appalachia is a particularly intriguing place to look for insights into the social construction of engagement between youth, adults, and their schools. The issues there are not unique. Indeed, it is a region that shares many common challenges with other depressed, marginalized, and "underdeveloped" communities (i.e. inner cities). Yet in Appalachia, perhaps the quintessentially "rural" in the (U.S.) American imagination, long-term contradictions are persistent and conspicuous to an unusual degree, making challenges "stand out, like the land itself, in high relief" (Shapiro, 1978: 126).

Appalachia has always been seen as "a land apart," a place defined in terms of its purported deficiencies in comparison with the rest of the United States. The history of community development in Appalachia has been an ongoing dialectic between local assertions of autonomy and self-definition and the authoritative interventions of a series of external interests in the region. Educators were one of a series of professional cadres who descended on the area to civilize "a strange land and peculiar people" (Bishop, 1937). Schools were to be one of the primary institutions set in gear to remedy the general "backwardness" of Appalachians, to "modernize the mountaineer" (Whisnant, 1978). Whisnant (1983) has pointed out the relationship between paternalistic cycles of rediscovering Appalachia as a place to be disciplined and developed and the ongoing exploitative project that has exacted a high price from this "internal colony" (Lewis, Johnson, and Askins, 1978).

Researchers have observed patterns of exploitation and marginalization that are similar between Appalachia and those in other regions (e.g. the Third World), nations, and post-colonial settings (Beaver and Parrington, 1984: Lewis, 1978: Royalty, 1975). These observations suggest that conclusions about how Appalachians work through their schools to achieve success on their own terms would resonate with related concerns in other communities that are similarly positioned. More recent analyses have described Appalachia as an "internal periphery," akin to those existing in the peripheral Third World. In these settings, a local elite transact with and profit from relations with the core elite. However, their neighbors, who exist on the margins of the

periphery, are hard pressed to participate gainfully above mere survival. This model has many useful implications for understanding the divergent, and often conflicting, priorities of people who live alongside one another within the peripheral community.

The results of educational reforms developed externally have been devastating not only to both rural Appalachian institutions but also to people who see their traditional lifeways as a precious resource to be nurtured rather than a liability to be remedied. Schools revolve around curricular offerings that negate the existence and importance of Appalachian experiences and worldviews. There is widespread disillusionment with the claim that schools offer routes to economic well-being, as skills taught find only limited local application. As a result, Appalachian schools are severely challenged to legitimate the claim that they offer students viable or valued paths to success.

Numerous studies (Kaplan, 1971; MACED, 1986; Reck and Reck, 1987; Reck, Reck. and Keefe, 1987) have documented how rural and Appalachian students and their parents are only marginal participants in school activities and discourse. Perceived differences, reinforced by racism and sexism, alienate low-status members of the community from formal educational systems.

The symptoms of so many Appalachian schools' inability to engage and retain students are reflected in nearly every formal measure of educational achievement; rural, Appalachian districts fare considerably worse than the rest of the state of Kentucky. A 1986 report on education stated that the predominantly rural and Appalachian Fifth Congressional District, "is to the state what the state is to the nation" on numerous measures of academic achievement (MACED: 1).

The mountain district selected for this study is typical of many of its neighbors in eastern Kentucky. Dogwood (a pseudonym) is chronically impoverished, religiously and politically conservative, sparsely populated, and interwoven with highly structured kinship networks, it is a microcosm that only recently, with the extension of a four-lane highway, has opened up to accept significant, daily interactions with the outside world.

There is a strong sense of place and pride in a cultural heritage that ties together several generations of people.

Schools are located in several hamlets throughout the county. Central High is located in the county seat, and many teachers and students must navigate often precarious mountain roads to reach it every morning. Nearly all students begin a high school education, but fewer than half will ever graduate. Although educators reported that they were adopting KERA-mandated site-based decision-making, restructuring, achievement goals, and pedagogical practices, in the past - other than a few isolated incidences - this has been little more than a rouse to make the district eligible for increased funding and to forestall a state investigation into district policies.

This state of affairs is slowly changing, with 1994-95 being the watershed year. The selection of a new, outsider principal at Central high school, the threat of a state take-over of the district due to mismanagement, and the timely resignation and selection of a new superintendent all worked together to open up the level of discourse at Central and in the district. For the first time, there was a sincere effort to implement KERA instead of undermining it simply because it was decreed by the state. This research program presents the power struggles that ensued, and the ways that the symbolic worlds that formed the foundation for these struggles were laid open to both criticism and change.

STUDY METHODS

Several methodological aspects of this ethnography distinguish this work from the previous research. First, my research program has been a collaborative effort that has integrated local educators' needs and perspectives into the project design at every stage. I served as a facilitator and information disseminator during a strategic series of transitions. Second, issues of gaining voice are central to the narrative of this study; the ethnographic nature of this research extends this discourse by providing another avenue through which the voices of those most profoundly affected by the changes in

their communities can emerge. Third, the in-depth nature of this work offers policy makers exceptional insight into the multiple, and often conflicting, realms where policies become real in the life of a community. Fourth, my methodology acknowledges and integrates the multiple dimensions of those involved (family allegiances, gender, academic achievement, race, SES, and connection to place). By linking these previously fragmented dimensions, my work is able to embrace the ambivalence and oppositions that make this situation so dynamic. Fifth, by comparing and contrasting the power differentials both within the community as well as between the community and the state, I offer a multi-layered analysis of engagement that shows how hierarchies of (dis)engagement are perpetuated.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

My theoretical framework unites symbolic anthropology with the social construction of problems to analyze community (dis)engagement with education, both as a process and as a formalized institution. The findings cluster under the three interlocking headings;

1) How has the "problem" of disengagement been socially constructed and what are the implications of this conceptualization?
2) What are the conditions and challenges under which citizen leadership does emerge?
3) How might continued non-participation be evidence of both resilience and resistance?

As this ethnography presents the lives of people who are actively negotiating the terms on which they will accept reform, it must be seen as an analysis of the inter-related events during a specific period of time, not as the final word on a static system. To these ends, in the larger work from which this paper is drawn I make extensive use of local metaphors and symbols that express the feelings, world views and ideas most on

people's minds at the time. I also use ritual analysis to show how problems are conceived, explained, legitimized, and sometimes, even transformed.

1. THE "PROBLEM" OF DISENGAGEMENT

From the first day in the field, what people perceived to be the fundamental problem was obvious, broadcast like a banner strung across the high school entranceway, "People here just don't care." One sees dilapidated buildings, students roaming the halls at all hours, books thrown in the corner, parents dropping off their children from pickups that barely come to a full stop along the street curb. And then there is the weary platoon of teachers who linger late in the shabby upstairs lounge, plying themselves from the vinyl couches in time to arrive in class just ahead of the stragglers who somehow manage one more kiss before turning into the classroom.

It is important to recognize the far-reaching implications of this underlying "problem" of disengagement and how it profoundly shapes life in this school and in its host communities. Disengagement from education starts young, and all too often carries through into adulthood. The assessment that this was simply how things are here was shared by teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. However, acceptance of such a simplistic assessment of the issue obscures important dimensions of the underlying dynamics. By separating out the various elements of the "problem," questioning its very construction as a problem, and investigating the mechanisms that keep it in place, the underlying situation becomes much more clear.

A critical dimension in the setting of (educational) policy is the right to define the "problems" to be "solved." As Berger and Luckman have noted, reality is socially defined; these "definitions of reality have self-fulfilling potency" (1967:116). Therefore, whether or not a socio-cultural system identifies a situation or paradigm as an intractable given or whether it will be treated as problematic, questionable, and, hence, even alterable, is a matter of great importance.

Defining an issue as a "problem" is therefore the first step in opening the door to a host of related understandings. Edelman elucidates the potential of defining something as a problem:

> Problems come into discourse and therefore into existence as reinforcements of ideologies, not simply because they are there or because they are important for well-being. They signify who are virtuous and useful and who are dangerous or inadequate, which actions will be rewarded and which penalized. They constitute people as subjects with particular kinds of aspirations, self-concepts, and fears, and they create beliefs about the relative importance of events and objects. They are critical in determining who exercises authority and who accepts it. They construct areas of immunity from concern because those areas are not seen as problems. Like leaders and enemies, they define the contours of the social world, not in the same way for everyone, but in the light of the diverse situation from which people respond to the political spectacle. (1988:12-13).

KERA mandates citizen participation in school-based decision-making, in the screening of candidates for superintendent, and in other elements of school governance. It also challenges schools to demand more consistent attendance and better performance of students, and has heavy sanctions for those schools who fall short of improvement goals. In this anxiety-provoking atmosphere of change and heightened accountability, the "problem" of disengagement takes on new life. Further, by focusing in on a school /community that is undergoing a fragmenting process of self-negotiation under KERA this study is able to highlight symbolic worlds which in a context of cultural inertia remain at the level of tacit understanding and minimal contestation.

Four elements of the social construction of this problem emerge as critical to the underlying dynamic of the situation:

1.1 THE CYCLE OF BLAME AND ALIENATION

First, there is a fundamental crisis of confidence in the school as an institution and in school personnel as competent and responsive educators. Few community members, and only slightly more teachers, feel that the school offers all students access to a quality education. This is linked, in the eyes of the community, to the belief that Central is no longer a community institution. The school and teachers are seen as

aloof, unresponsive to the demands of parents and the needs of students. People ask, " why should I trust that the schools even have my or my child's best interests in mind?"

This basic problem is viewed in terms of a nostalgic (and barely twenty-five year distant) past of one-room schools where it seemed that everyone had a role and a stake. These once harmonious school-community-family ties are contrasted with the present system, in which few members of the community feel welcome or valued at school. There is a pervasive sentiment that teachers expect student failure and parent apathy, especially for those from less prominent or less well-educated families. This in turn reinforces students' and parents' desire to further disengage from a frustrating process that they define as unrelated to future employment, favors, or valued community roles.

Those within the schools are the first to admit that the schools are not there first and foremost for educating children. The schools are viewed as vehicles for allotting coveted, relatively well-paid positions. "It's really all about jobs here not the kids. Jobs come first," is the mantra that I heard repeated from cooks to the those in the highest administrative positions. In a county that has been listed as one of the most economically distressed since 1965, the average teacher salary of $24,000 plus benefits far outpaces the mean *family* income of $15,000. Even jobs as a janitor or bus driver offer security and wages that make them highly valuable pawns in the game of strategically allocating positions.

Despite often overwhelming local evidence, most people in Dogwood tenaciously cling to the ideal that education is the key to personal well-being and community revival. Nevertheless, even many of those who *do* feel that they can influence and participate in their or their children's schooling still try to distance themselves from education as an institution if not a process. Both very high achievers and those who have seldom found success at school particularly are apt to disengage from identifying with Central, stating "I'm embarrassed to say where I go to school." Some feel that attending school is actually a hindrance to achieving a valued or respected kind of education. Thus other students, ones on the verge of dropping out, complained, "What's the use of a diploma

anyways, people don't think one from Central is worth nothing - it won't help you get a job."

As a result, few people wish to be associated with what is deemed as a failing and corrupt system. Fewer still are courageous enough to speak their mind on school policy when repercussions on a kin member's job are more than an idle threat. The cycle of disengagement intensifies when some teachers readily adopt the view that since students and parents seemingly don't care, there is nothing that teachers can be expected to do with them. This construction of the problem presents of certain people as more virtuous than others. It casts those who do not participate in schooling as not wanting to participate in education, when these are actually separate but interrelated issues. Alienation is the order of the day, and communication between Central and all but a few elite homes has broken down almost entirely.

1.2. "EVERYTHING HERE IS PERSONAL"

A second element that reinforces the current understanding of the problem of disengagement is that a call for change is taken as a personal affront. There is the belief, particularly by the teaching elite, that people outside of schools do not care and do not have to education necessary to think about the issues, and that reasonable people do not rock the boat. Therefore, involvement in school affairs, especially that which threatens to change the status quo, is a highly suspect venture.

Not only parents, but also teachers or administrators who try to import new ideas or who criticize allocation of scarce resources or privileges are seen as trying to gain an advantage. They do not automatically have the right to get involved, they have no authority to engage in discourse as equals. People ask, "why does she/he care?" and "why is he/she getting involved?" Motives and aspirations are suspect. Objectors are perceived as dangerous competitors in a zero-sum game where the question "what does she/he have to gain?" reflects the idea that those affected can only lose if reform happens.

As a result, complaints can be perfunctorily dismissed as "he must have something personal against the superintendent to keep criticizing him." Suggestions for restructuring are construed as "she just wants block scheduling because then that department would get more students." At Central this meant that long-standing personal grievances and friendships were tested, and personal allegiances became the center of focus, not pedagogical issues. Thus when the final vote came down on block scheduling, they nay-sayers were confident enough to state publicly, "it's not a vote against the policy, it's a vote against *them*."

1.3. SETTING THE STAGE FOR CHANGE

Third, in the past, many areas of school life were immune from public concern because they had not been seen as problematic. Attendance and literacy were low, drop outs and teen parenthood rates were high. An educator, commenting on the state of affairs commented, "We just thought that things would always be like this- that were are poor Appalachians and so we couldn't expect any better. Everyone expected us to fail."

However, with a new, purposely cultivated awareness that KERA - and the State-expected more, a sense that other outcomes were possible began to slowly take hold in some educators' minds. The significant increases in available funds, made possible through the financial provisions of KERA, sparked even more interest in the schools, even though they had always been the most lucrative business in the county. This was heightened by the discovery that the district did indeed have considerably more bondable funds than they were previously led to believe, and now a middle school and/or a new high school might be possible. The epiphany of realizing that the current state of affairs was not the way that things had to be led to increased dissatisfaction with current leaders and with the decision-making practices that had excluded all but a few from key decisions. In summary, people were willing to accept the current situation as a

problem only when there was a viable option on the horizon. And now, that horizon seemed to have moved a little closer.

1.4. THE STATE PRESENCE

A fourth dimension of the underlying problem is the perception that what happens locally ultimately does not matter because "the State" is out to get us, an eastern Kentucky Appalachian district. KERA gives the Office of Educational Accountability the power to enforce mandates and monitor outcomes. Through the OEA the state has reasserted its legitimacy to judge, and, ultimately, intervene if "correct" changes are too slow in coming. In extreme cases, the State now has the legal right to take over districts and oust administrators and Board members. Residents of Dogwood looked on nervously as several of its neighboring counties had been selected to be examples to others that the State would indeed exert this newly established right.

Distrust of state officials' motives is pervasive. The comment, "Now they just want to give us money so they can tell us what to do with it," fell on eager ears. Throughout the year the State kept putting off its threatened full investigation into the district's affairs which only served to intensify resentment and to fuel gossip. The sentiments that "whatever we do, they want things to be their way," and "they're out to get us" reinforced the sense that disengagement from school affairs was the most tactically sound course of action. The affect of this belief in the State's expectation of local failure on the already tenuous local embrace of democratization forms a core question of the larger research program.

2. EMERGING LEADERSHIP: CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

As the theme of this conference is opportunities for excellence, this second section presents the conditions and challenges under which citizen leadership emerges. At least some students, parents, and teachers have come to see the schools are "theirs,"

and have effectively (re-) engaged with both the process and institution of education. During this year significant steps were made at Central in the transition to greater public engagement and the emergence of public leaders, especially women, through such KERA-sponsored groups as site-based councils and the superintendent screening committee. Some successes were recorded, and even those decisions that might be deemed failures carried in them the seed of change.

The concepts of what constitutes an acceptable and respectable leaders are socially constructed. They are fundamentally enmeshed in the way that the underlying problem are themselves conceptualized. When the disengagement started, whose to blame, and if and when the situation can or should be changed shape the opportunities for those who would become involved. Who is seen as virtuous, informed, rightfully concerned, or selfishly interested, dangerous, and not to be trusted as related to understandings of what counts as a real problem. Likewise, which issues come to the fore and how they can be addressed are tied to local concepts of who we are and what we stand for relative to others' expectations.

In turn, these concepts are then displayed in public rituals, both long-standing ones, e.g. school board meetings, and those more recently mandated through KERA, e.g. site-based councils. They are reflected in presentations of self and the future ("we are mountain"). They also become entwined with local metaphors about the world as new boundaries of the possible are envisioned.

This paper will focus on those groups that offer new and or expanded opportunities for adults to become involved with the schools. Youth engagement with the schools, their interaction with the adults' groups, and how youth learn about their potential and expected adult roles all are significant aspect of democratization that are explored further in the larger dissertation. Running through the activities of each of these groups are two major motifs, autonomy versus accountability and the legitimacy of actors.

2.1 AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Issues of autonomy versus accountability set the bounds for defining and dealing with problems. Kentucky school districts are, for the most part, contiguous with the county line; these demarcate large domains that have been under the exclusive control of the superintendent and, sometimes, also the school board. Dogwood County's superintendent, who enjoyed a position that was essentially his for life, exercised almost feudal lord-like powers in setting policies, especially those related to hiring and finances. He also set the bounds of what was acceptable discourse in the central office, what was open to question and what favors could be requested. He also extended this power to define the realms of acceptable change to those to whom he had granted principalships, giving them considerable control over their own domains and the reassurance that he would have the final say if any challenges came up. Teachers knew that if they tried to circumvent the existing chain of command, for example, by complaining to state officials, they would soon find themselves in a very precarious position. Their name and complaint would be passed on to the superintendent, so teachers learned not to look to the State Department of Education as an ally. As a result of these unwritten, but universally known, codes, the system is coming out from under the policy that if you don't admit to a "problem" or allow public discussion of it, it does not exist.

This was exacerbated by retiring leaders' attitudes of "just don't cause us problems and we won't cause you any." However, the power that they previously enjoyed to stave off the mounting problems has been challenged by a recent move to establish - and enforce- rules for both student, teacher, and administrator conduct. Further, administrators' and teachers' autonomy have been severely curtailed by changes that are part of KERA. Not only parent and citizens have greater opportunities for input and oversight, but the State also enjoys an expanded role. Site-based decision making councils and superintendent screening committees established in KERA offer previously disengaged and disenfranchised people new opportunities for public

leadership. They offer the means, however problematic, of establishing local accountability systems. What is more, because they are established in KERA, there is state-level legal recourse. The fact that the State hovers behind the decisions made by parent activists, makes their decrees all the more resented by and suspicious to some school personnel.

2.2 THE LEGITIMACY OF ACTORS

The second major motif, gaining legitimacy as a public actor, is an important precondition for those who would assume positions of leadership and authority. In order to participate effectively one has to establishing one's right to participate, or at least provide an acceptable excuse for the intrusion, and then negotiate with others, often including extended family members, how the desired changes will be supported. Three elements of establishing oneself as a legitimate participant emerged from the fieldwork.

First and foremost, being designated an "insider" instead of an "outsider" is critical to making claims to authority. These multivalent symbols have become pivotal in this district - they profoundly reinforce local resistance to external authority and well as demarcate local camps. An insider is one who "knows how we do things here," understands and honors the local balance sheet of favors due, has connections through family and/or community that he or she can call upon, will defend a friend in public or will at least gossip disparagingly about the offender in private, and can expect long-term favors for services rendered in the short run. An outsider is one "who is not from here," "who doesn't understand how we do things." She or he has no one to whom she or he is obliged, and therefore is not perceived to have a sense of long-term responsibility or commitment on key issues. There are few ways to exert social pressure on outsiders, and few opportunities to see what kind of person he or she is like outside of the public arena. In short, an outsider cannot be trusted. These labels are dynamic, continually being redefined to include new areas as the terms of the discourse change. Thus, for example,

when the final vote on block scheduling became pivotal in proving just who held power at Central, being an insider then included voting along a certain party line on that issue.

While these labels can be conferred at birth or marriage by virtue of the family that one entered, they must be continually earned as an adult. Therefore local elites may become outsiders through their opposition just as marginal members may jump on a bandwagon and become, at least provisionally, insiders. The social costs for either defector may be high, although the exact strategies that friends and family use to dissuade the person may vary.

Second, as core symbols of who "we" are, these labels are intimately linked with social constructions of acceptable leadership styles. For example, local taboos against acting like an "outsider" are equated with behaving as an "expert," or someone who is "gettin' above their raising." A person may rise to an administrative position, but as long as he is still a "good old boy," someone the average person feels they can talk to, his decisions will be acknowledged. A leader who disregards local opinion, or who is unwilling to acknowledge services or information provided by others is suspect, charged with "knowing it all himself." He did not seem to need others.

Those who seek out curriculum innovations that worked somewhere else or pedagogical styles originating from far away are criticized for thinking that what exists locally is not good enough. In a place that has been repeatedly compared unfavorably to more prosperous and mainstream places, this charge strikes a sore spot. Educators or parents who use theoretical language, unfamiliar jargon (and KERA has produced volumes of this), or non-dialect ways of speaking are seen as acting "high and mighty." Those who cite educational theorists or textbook models, or drop names of experts whom they met a conferences are often seen as wanting to align themselves with the world beyond the local hollows, perhaps even the State. This has implications for education itself, for those who achieve high levels of formal education are at a greater risk of "losing the mountain," and thus no longer being able to fit in and effectively participate in community discourse.

Third, the claim that you are working "in the best interest of the children" is frequently and strategically used, often with the intent of masking personal and/or kin-group interests. Every group charges that others are working for selfish interests, not, as they are, in the best interest of the children. A few discussions this year at Central did look at the holistic and long-term needs of students and drop-outs, trying to identify just what "the best interests" actually might mean. However, when this charge was made, discussion often came to a halting stop, and the accused was not asked to define what she or he intended to do for the children of Dogwood. This statement continues to be a powerful charge that can be leveled against any opponent. As it remains undefined, its ambiguity serves to made it all the more widely applicable.

3. RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

Scott (1990) offers insights into the "hidden transcripts" of resistance, focusing on how subordinated groups, although they may appear silenced in the schools, cultivate a secret discourse that critiques the exercise of power and hegemony. Even if they do not leave physically, mountain students have a tendency to withdraw psychically from conflict-ridden situations (Fanning, 1974; Browning, 1978). But they are far from silent - repeated protest fires in the bathrooms, songs, jokes, and graffiti all attest to the tensions and contradictions that Central High experienced this year. Likewise, teachers' comments in the lounge and at lunch give evidence of their frustrations, dissenting views, and alternative strategies, ideas that were seldom voiced in the formal staff meetings. Boycotts of these meetings were almost as prevalent as student absences from class. And in the classroom, non-action on implementing critical thinking exercises, monitoring discipline rules, or taking accurate attendance were also repeatedly used as forms of resistance. Whether by teacher or student, each of these acts of defiance bolstered self-esteem, and the sense that external control, whether by the new principal or the State, was not complete. A further contribution of this research is thus to point to ways in which local responses are evidence of both resistance and

resiliency on the part of people who are negotiating the terms on which they will accept reform.

A strong sense of place and family inspires Appalachians' desires to remain distinct and to act on their own behalf to create sustainable communities that they control. In different ways, both the local elite who are, ultimately, losing power and privilege and their neighbors who dare to grasp at power see themselves as "subordinated" in the struggle against the State and against one another. Each group resists advances by the other by making use of the social gossip networks, media access, church congregations, and the family ties at their disposal. Deciding how much to push in the realm of the formal institutions where site-based councils are the order of the day, and when to agitate behind the scenes are important elements of the power struggle. Each involved group also seeks an acceptable balance between private and public power, between the embrace of changes and the revival of treasured lifeways.

School-related rituals are events where the rules of engagement are displayed for all to see. Public displays of authority exemplify resistance on the part of those with power; public hearings embody the resistance of those groups which advocate for greater, more diverse citizen involvement. Likewise, rituals of reassurance, primarily school board meetings, have been used strategically to restrict the flow of (negative) information to those who would challenge the exclusive rights of the board and superintendent. In similar ways, new rituals, e.g. site-based council meetings, can be used to open the flow of information and provide meaningful roles that engage previously marginalized members of the community.

Furthermore, in these public settings symbols that express community identity, e.g. we are "mountain," can emerge. When coupled with acts of resistance, these metaphors gain renewed meaning, serving, as this one has, as a rallying cry of resistance. Showing that you are "mountain people" means standing solid as a rock against pressures to cave in to external demands. It means holding to your own ground, and remaining a distinct cultural entity in a mass-culture, transient,

consumer-oriented society. It means a resilience to the fleeting winds of change that many local people expect will simply shift as soon as the political climate cools down.

SUMMARY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AMBIVALENCE

Rural Appalachian schools are the critical juncture where the local and the supra-local meet head to head. Schools are both setting and symbol of the local community's vitality and self-concept. Control over the schools as institutions and education as a process is linked to sustainability of other parts of the community. Therefore changes at this highly visible and influential institution threaten to catalyze other transformations of power hierarchies; there is little wonder that the schools remains the most hotly contested place of conflict in this county.

As a result of the events during this year of transition, more than ever, ambivalence marks residents' concepts of the multiple roles the schools should play as well as the roles that they should play in their schools. There is ambivalence about the nature of acceptable change and the terms on which residents are willing to accept reform. Most people, especially the local elite, resent the implication inherent in the state's current investigation that they are unable to govern their own affairs. Yet, many look to outside intervention, albeit on their own terms, as the only solution. Furthermore, change is only acceptable to the extent that it does not define eastern Kentucky cognitive frameworks and social-political relations as "problems" to be solved by "flatlanders."

Ambivalence about the costs and benefits of engagement in educational reform can create a difficult and fear-provoking situation, one that stymies action. This is especially true for those who have long been marginalized from schools and schooling. But it is also true for those local elite who could lose a great deal by invoking the anger of their peers and family by pushing for reform.

The current construction of the problem of disengagement blames the disengaged for their own fears and lack of action and does not recognize the ways that this ambivalence has been cultivated by institutional practices. As a result, the onus of involvement has been placed on those least likely to speak up. While some have found a measure of success with KERA's site-based councils or the superintendent screening committee, most people actively withdraw from school activities and instead engage in discourse about education outside of the schools. In this way they are able to define themselves as competent actors, yet remain untainted by their association with the school. Unfortunately, this leaves Central, the embodiment of educational aims in Dogwood county, in a precarious position, with no clear community consensus about what it does and where it should be going. Cole (1990) warns that an ambivalent [community] self-concept can reinforce under investment in local economic and social life, thus accelerating the spiral of rural decline that has marked the 1980s.

But ambivalence is not necessarily only negative- it also is a creative, questioning space. Ambivalence thrives in meetings where teachers and parents are able to openly question the status quo, in computer access to the information superhighway which provides a delivery system for new goods and services, and in the KERA workshops that bring together people from many regions of the state. It is in these places, that amidst the expressions of anxiety about the future and concern about one's place in the new order, that there can emerge creative syntheses and invigorating alternatives to current constructions of the main problem of disengagement.

Those actively working with school reform, those individuals on the cultural borderlands, the rough edges "where world[views]s collide" (Anzaldua, 1987), are particularly well-positioned to highlight contradictions inherent in urban-normed ways of understanding education and the schools' roles within its host communities. Appalachians in this county operate along the edges of a potentially divisive juncture, a fissure that exposes their underlying assumptions and self-concepts. It is along this opening that educators at Central are struggling to build both a community of learners

within the school as well as to build bridges to other community members. They must negotiate a tenuous path that will balance the needs of many constituencies, but that ultimately serves the best interests of the children. In their search for a unique and culturally responsive way, the rural voices that sound forth through this study offer diverse and poignant understandings of the meaning of engagement. These then have the potential to challenge current approaches to standardized reform.